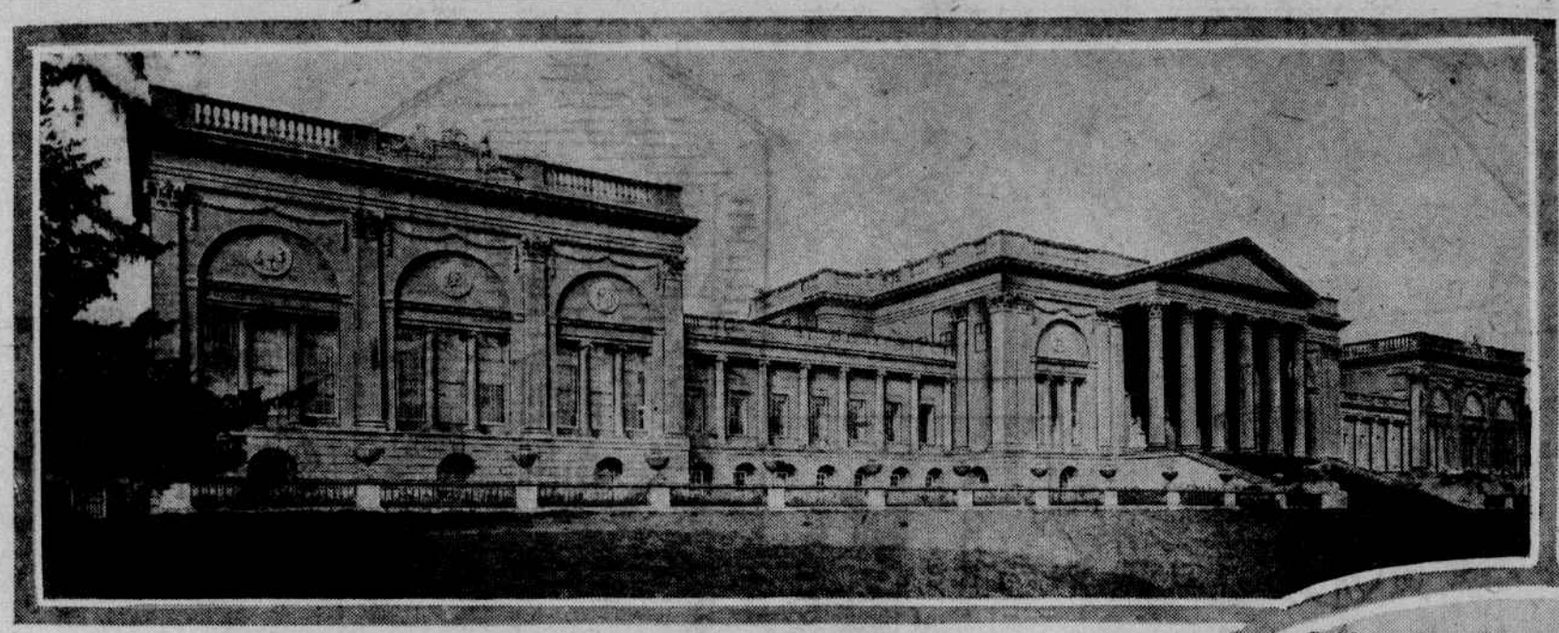
PROUD ENGLISH ESTATES SELL FOR PITTANCES

South front of Stowe, in Buckinghamshire, one of the famous English homes sold recently at auction. The facade from east to west is 916 feet long, and the palace cost £500,000 to build; it brought one-tenth of this. The curtained bed below is in the state bedchamber at Stowe.



Ever Increasing Taxes, War Ruined Families and Demand for Farm Lands Force Many Historic Places on Market at Enormous Sacrifices

THIS study of the heavy disposals of great English country properties is from the pen of one of the best known authorities in London on the real property market in Great Britain.

Special Correspondence to THE NEW YORK HERALD.

New York Herald Bureau, London, Sept. 1.

DESPITE all the "stately homes of England" that have passed under the hammer within the last few months and despite the daily page and more of the *Times* advertising further splendid properties for sale, by far the bulk of the estates, great and small, will remain in the hands of the original owners.

Up to fifty years ago 2,000 persons owned half the agricultural land of England and Wales. Heavy as have been the sales, past and to come, they make no serious dent in the ranks of these great property owning classes. In Scotland a Parliamentary committee reported only the other day that nearly a fifth of the country's total area was reserved in deer forests.

There can be no doubt, however, that the sales have been heavy and estates of supreme historic and artistic interest have recently passed into new hands. They have passed into the hands of three classes: People of recent wealth, like Lord Leverhulme and Lord Beatty, institutions and hotels and the housebreaker and lot seller.

The toll has been the heaviest in the medium sized establishments. That means places used primarily for pleasure. They have had large houses and relatively small amounts of agricultural land. In estates where the agricultural land ran into thousands of acres sales of part of the land enabled proprietors to hold onto the most valuable sections, with their mansions, in the face of rising costs and taxes. Medium sized places have had to go entire.

Formerly Owner Lost Head When He Lost His Home

When "the stately homes of England" changed hands in the Middle Ages it was often by royal grant or forfeiture, and the holder literally lost his head under the axe of the executioner at the same time. To-day when he loses his ancestral home under the hammer of the auctioneer he does not lose his head, literally or figuratively, but reinvests the purchase money in what are called "gilt edged securities," and rejoices at his release from the burdens of landlordism.

Half a century ago a census of land owners, known as "the New Domesday," was compiled. The old Domesday, drawn up just after the Norman Conquest in 1066, gave a remarkably comprehensive and accurate survey of English land. In passing, it may be mentioned as showing the continuity of English land tenure, that it is common to find the history of some estate now in the market commencing with the Norman records, which are still preserved and can be inspected at the Record Office in London.

The "New Domesday" proved that the land of England and Wales, exclusive of London, of roads, crown forests, wastes, commons and houses and gardens of less than an acre, amounted to 32,862,343 acres. But as a matter of fact 2,000 persons owned half the agricultural land of the country. The area so held was by no means evenly distributed among that comparatively small number, some owners having over 100,000 acres, a few approximately twice that area and others 50,000 or more.

The New Domesday had not been issued very long when a disastrous season afflicted British farmers and widespread ruin ensued. The landlords came to the rescue with heavy remissions of rent, though continuing to spend money freely in the upkeep of farms. The corner was turned, comparative prosperity came again to the tenants, but rents remained at the low point to which they had fallen to meet the emergency.

Judged as income producing property, land declined very seriously in market value, and all the while the owners, the landed gentry, were trying to keep up the country houses with their amenities and to defray tithe, mortgage interest, family burdens and the cost of maintaining estates in a proper condition.

At Length the Great Land Owners Learned Theirs Was a Business

That is the meaning of the oft quoted expression nowadays, in particulars of sale, that "the farms are let at old and utterly inadequate rentals." Not for the first time the landed gentry failed to realize that "land owning is a business." They stood the strain well up to the year 1914, and a gradual readjustment of rents was making the position more endurable in an economic sense.

Two excellent illustrations of the difficulties of large landed proprietors came to light only this week with the publication in the *Times* of abstracts of the accounts of the Duke of Bedford and an almost pathetic statement to his tenants by the Duke of Portland. The former showed that his gross revenue from 16,600 acres in Bedfordshire and Buckinghamshire was £23,437, and on this amount he had to pay income and supertax to the amount of £3,623. Yet, after deducting his compulsory expenditure on the estate and his local rates, tithes and duties he had only a net profit to pay income tax out of of £1,105. In other words, he is able to keep the estate going only because he is also one of the largest proprietors of London property, a great part of which he recently disposed of in the famous Covent Garden and Strand deal, and is also presumably a heavy holder of gilt edged securities of various sorts.

The actual figures for this estate as printed in the *Times* from the attested statements of the Duke's auditors and the comments of the *Times's* expert on them follow:

ACTUAL GROSS RECEIPTS.

Rentals	£18,228	
Woodlands	1,945	
Timber yard	2,552	
Sundry receipts	712	
		£23,437

PAYMENTS ON UPKEEP.

Repairs	£8,859	
Management (apportioned on an acreage basis)	4,776	
Insurance	509	
Maintenance	194	
Tools	31	
Surveying	2	
Payments under Workmen's Compensation Act for Accidents	35	
Allowance to tenants	137	
Labor felling timber and hedgerow timber	848	
Expenses of timber yard	2,080	
Expenses of killing rabbits	327	
Expenses of waterworks and sewers	623	
Expenses of unoccupied premises	65	
Expenses of almshouses, town hall and market place	162	
		£18,648
Total of obligatory payments on the upkeep of the property		£18,648
Surplus before taxation		£4,789

The above expenditure of £18,648 is obligatory and not voluntary. A landlord is legally liable for repairs under his contract of tenancy. The public health authority can compel him to equip and maintain his dwelling houses according to their ever changing views as to the best system of sanitation, drainage and water supply. If a landlord neglects annual repairs his property quickly deteriorates and repairs become more and more costly.

Estate management necessitates a staff with a practical and technical knowledge of a good many subjects, such as agriculture, forestry, the building trade, engineering and surveying, accounts and bookkeeping, property law in all its branches and a complicated system of rating and taxation.

TAXATION, OTHER THAN INCOME TAX AND SUPERTAX, BORNE BY THE OWNER.

Land tax	£567
Tithe	1,686
Rates on cottages, allotments, small gardens, woods, &c.	1,082
Rent charges	275
Inland revenue licences	20
Licence compensation fund	11
Stamp duties on leases	43
	£3,684

The surplus of £4,789 before any taxation is paid less £3,684 shows the excess of receipts over expenditure before payment of income and supertax to be £1,105.

The estate is solvent, showing a profit of £1,105. Income tax and supertax are assessed on the gross income of £23,437, less certain deductions allowed by the Finance Act of 1918, which in the year 1920 made the owner's liability for income tax and supertax to be £3,623.

The demand to be met for income tax and supertax is £3,623. The gain on the estate working is £1,105. The owner therefore finds that after defraying the expenses of earning this profit, he has to pay the Government £3 5s. 6d. for every sovereign of excess of receipts over expenditure. The payment of £3,623 for income tax and supertax changes the £1,105 of excess of receipts over expenditure into a deficit of £2,518. The estate is left *per se* insolvent, and, if retained, must be maintained out of capital.

There is a further expenditure which, although not obligatory, is inseparable from the fulfilment of a landowner's duties to others, but disappears when an estate is sold. These are:

Pensions to aged or disabled former estate employees	£952
Allowances to workmen for holidays and illness	157
Donations and stipends to clergy and parochial funds, maintenance of churches, &c.	1,016
Donations to hunt funds, cricket and football clubs, flower shows, agricultural and nursing associations, hospitals, &c.	547
	£2,672

Duke May Be Able to Live On Property, Descendants Cannot

The estate therefore represented an actual net cost to the owner for the year 1920 of £5,190. This relates entirely to the agricultural portion of the estate, and includes no charge whatever for the Duke's house, park, home farm or the wages of servants or any other persons employed on the residential establishment.

In commenting on the charges for upkeep it is pointed out that the £8,859 expended for this purpose represents 37 per cent. of the estate's gross income. It is admitted that the charges for repairs are particularly heavy, as all repairs practically had to be suspended during the war on the 587 cottages on the estate. To make the housing conditions in these cottages even just the same as they were before the war, through the repair of roofs and chimneys and other things essential to their habitability, will involve a total expenditure of £20,000. And the cottages bringing in an average rent of only 1s. 8d. per week, that means that practically eight years' rental will be swallowed up if all the repairs are carried through.

The Duke of Portland did not go into details with regard to his great estate around Welbeck Abbey, for he made his statement upon a very sentimental occasion. His tenants, gathered at the estate horse and foal show, had presented to his son and heir a handsome sporting gun in an oak case, and a gold watch. The relations between owner and tenant on this estate have been admirable for many years, due to the indefatigable labors in behalf of their people by the Duchess as well as by the Duke.

"I fear," said the Duke, "that the war has changed everything. With the present enormous taxation and the heavy incidence of death duties the future has become very uncertain for all landed proprietors. If this is for the good of the country, I do not complain—I merely desire to state the undoubted facts.

"With regard to my own case, it may or it may not be possible for me and my family to continue to reside at Welbeck; but I fear there can be but little doubt—I hope I am wrong—that those who come after me will be unable to do so. It is of no use whatever blinking the fact, and it is of no use whatever deceiving the country or one's self, that if the present high rate of taxation continues, and if the present scale of death duties remains, there must be a wholesale closing down of the larger country houses, if not now, at all events when the present generation passes away."

Then came the war, and, excluding that terribly large number of cases where the family incentive to retain ownership was blotted out in a night, difficulties multiplied, as taxation rose to a point at which net incomes almost or wholly vanished. Concurrently came a period of temporary and doubtful prosperity for farmers, who were immune from foreign competition and could sell everything they grew at top prices. They were well to do and dreaded above everything the risk of being dispossessed of their farms, for there were no farms to be let anywhere.

Consequently farmers were only too glad to buy their farms, and landlords, attracted by the new high level of interest on Government and other easily convertible securities, put hundreds of thousands of acres into the market. Ancient foundations, such as the Charterhouse charity and Christ's Hospital—the blue coat school—were as prompt as individual landowners in the realization of real estate, and the financial results were very satisfactory to the vendors, Christ's Hospital, for instance, augmenting its annual income by over £10,000 through the reinvestment of purchase money.

The sale of agricultural land was easy, and for reasons which it would take too long to examine here the farmer who bought with the intention of farming his land was free from some of the difficulties experienced by proprietors who had merely owned and let the land. Along with the farms frequently the mansion and park came under the hammer of the auctioneer, and the effort to sell them presented sometimes an intricate problem.

The great country mansions are expensive to maintain, and their accommodation is in excess of what all but the wealthiest and most openhanded require. At the same time, by buying them or renting them, it has been well said that a man "may enter into the heritage of centuries." At one bound he becomes a person of weight throughout a district, and may hope to assume various interesting and honorific offices, some of which, such as the position of High Sheriff, are not coveted by men of restricted means.

A wonderful range of sport awaits him—hunting, shooting, fishing and golf, and if he is a social individual he will find plenty of friends, men of affairs or plain country gentlemen, according to his tastes, who will welcome him to their houses and be glad to enjoy his hospitality in turn. An illimitable range of interests opens to him, and we have personally known many men who went as total strangers to a county, but who soon became known and liked and a power in their adopted district. Privileges of no mean order may, in short, be enjoyed by a man who can afford to rent or buy an English country seat, and the cost is not prohibitive.

A Choice of Historic Homes May Be Had for a Moderate Rental

Scores of historic houses may now be taken at a moderate rental, inclusive in many cases of the magnificent antique and other furniture with which so many old mansions are enriched. Sometimes a tenancy is granted with an option to purchase, and in the case of one well known seat, Ragley Hall, Warwickshire, it has just been announced that a nominal rent would be accepted from any one willing to expend money on the house.

In the same county is a castle, Maxstoke, of early mediæval date, which can be rented for a few pounds a week. There are castles—real baronial strongholds and once royal palaces—with a teeming wealth of history, and every modern luxury of equipment, to be had for a few hundreds a year. The owners cannot keep them for their own occupation and prefer to let them at a low rent rather than see them empty and neglected. That, then, is one way in which the great houses of England are dealt with. There are others, chiefly conversion to institutional uses, such as schools and sanatoria; and, happily, still infrequent, demolition and sale as building material.

First, not because of its surpassing magnitude or value, but as of peculiar interest to American readers, let Glenham Hall, Suffolk, be mentioned. Among the notable men connected with that seat was Elihu Yale, founder of the university which bears his name. The property, now for sale, has among its treasures a sundial bearing the armorial device of that celebrated man.

Reigate Priory, just purchased by Admiral Lord Beatty, is a magnificent old mansion in Surrey, with one of the most elaborate examples extant of carving in its mantelpiece. This is believed to have come from a remarkable palace in the same county called "Nonsuch," erected by Henry VIII. That palace was well named, for, though it was demolished long ago, there are views which reveal it as embodying externally an incredible profuseness of ornamentation and on a scale of unusual magnitude.

Famous Stowe Mansion Brought Only 50,000 Pounds at Auction

Turn next to Stowe, in Buckinghamshire, one of the most famous mansions in England and the second largest—the Duke of Marlborough's Blenheim Castle only is larger. Stowe has just been sold by public auction, with 1,400 acres, for only £50,000. This palace—there is no other word for it—the work of the great Vanbrugh, must have cost quite half a million sterling at the end of the seventeenth century.

Pope and other poets, statesmen and writers like Walpole and Lord Beaconsfield, were proud to praise it, and the scale of the hospitality dispensed there by the Duke of Chandos and his successors will be apparent when it is stated that the mahogany dining table was sixty-five feet long. When we saw it last it was groaning under gold and silver plate that bore "lot" numbers, preparatory to the sale of the contents of the place.

The buyer of the mansion has under consideration the practicability of presenting Stowe to the nation. Just what could be done with it is not clear, for it is far from London or any other large centre and there has been talk of making it into a school or college. The grounds contain a score of "temples" dedicated to classical and other real and mythical personages, buildings now sadly decayed, but elaborate and worthy of preservation, and perhaps of rebuilding elsewhere. Stowe was let for some years to the Comte de Paris, who died there in 1894. He liked the place because it reminded him of Versailles.

Holme Lacy, Hereford, also loved by Pope and praised by Spenser in "The Faerie Queene," is likewise for sale.

Moor Park, Hertfordshire, has been sold to Lord Leverhulme, who is laying out the grounds in a manner suggestive of the use of the place primarily for golf and other sports. As long ago as 1685 Sir William Temple, a notable figure in English history, recorded that Moor Park had "the perfectest figure of a garden I ever saw," and its gardens are still its glory, noble as the house itself undoubtedly is.

Home for Prime Minister Given To the Nation by Lord Lee

Chequers, on the Chiltern Hills, has been presented by Lord Lee of Fareham to the nation as the official country house of the Prime Minister.

Blickling Hall, Norfolk, a very famous mansion built about 1625, has been let, furnished, for a term of years to Mrs. Hoffman of New York and Newport with the shooting over ten square miles. This estate, belonging to the Marquess of Lothian, is rich in historical interest and richer still in the universality of the appeal made by the fact that two at least of the characters mentioned by Shakespeare held it. One, Henry the Fifth's "good old knight," Sir Thomas de Erpingham (Henry V., act iv., sc. 1), and the other, Sir John Fastolfe—not to be confused with the portly Falstaff (Henry VI., Part 1, act iv., sc. 1). There Anne Boleyn, one of the beheaded queens of King Henry VIII., had her home, and before that there was a house on the site surrounded for defensive purposes by a moat which, now drained dry, encircles the mansion.

Another great poet, Robert Burns, has enshrined his admiration of Taymouth Castle, Perthshire, in melodious verse, "famed Breadalbane opens to my view." That seat, withdrawn at auction a few months since at £200,000, has just found a buyer. The castle is now for resale with 8,000 acres, and its use as a hydropathic hotel is suggested.

The North Wales stronghold, Gwydyr Castle, has been less fortunate, for, failing to be sold in its entirety the place is now in course of being dismantled and the old furniture has been sold. The panelling and carving got by the Wynn family during four or five centuries is to be removed, that in two of the rooms having fetched £10,000 and that in seven other rooms being for sale for £12,000. Thenceforth the castle, if it is to be preserved at all, will be merely a modernized dwelling divested of its old interior charm.

No better idea of the curiosity and beauty of the historical treasures with which so many old English and Welsh seats are endowed can be conveyed than by the views of the pair of sixteenth century leather figures (4 feet high) of Queen Elizabeth and Sir Walter Raleigh. The height of the figures, being stated, gives the scale of the panelling in the rooms.

Queen Elizabeth's Bed Brought at Auction £1,100

The so-called bulbous legged tables are among the oddest survivals of early mediæval furniture extant, and the state bedstead on which Queen Elizabeth and later Charles I. reposed is a notable work, which, by the way, was sold for £1,100.

Gregynog, another North Wales seat, rejoicing in such carving and panelling as only the mediæval Welsh seem able to have wrought, has also been spoken of as salable in a somewhat similar manner. Quenby Hall, in the Midlands, like the two Welsh seats and countless others, had a perfectly unrivalled collection of furniture, but it has been dispersed under the hammer, and the place itself has shared the common fate of coming under the hammer.

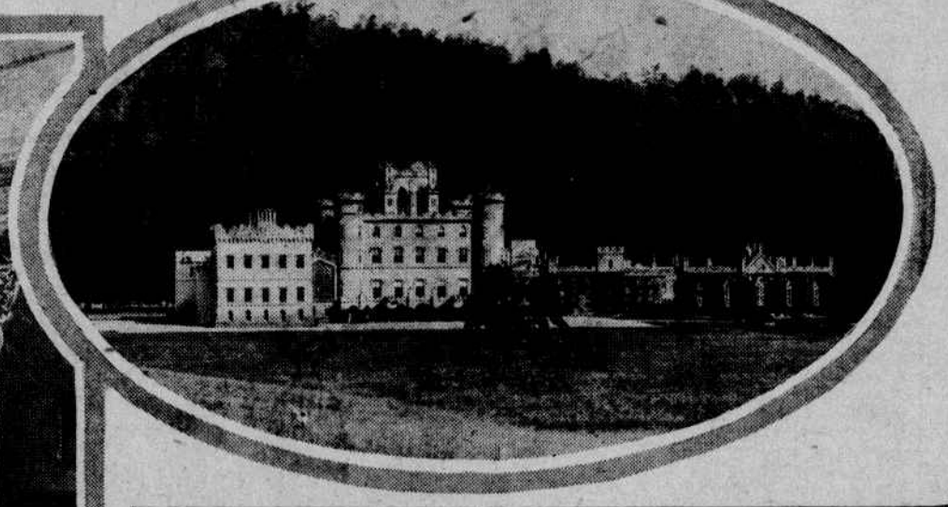
Of great houses that have been converted to institutional purposes in the last few weeks or months only a few can be mentioned. A Berkshire mansion has been made into an orphanage; another in Bucks into a training home for London deaf children; Bedgebury, a palatial mansion on the Kent and Sussex borders, has become a boarding school for girls; Deepdene, a famous Surrey seat, has just been turned into a hotel; Cefn Mabiys, most historic of South Wales mansions, is to be a convalescent home for the workers of a Cardiff firm, and the late Mme. Patti's South Wales castle, Craig-y-Nos, has been bought for conversion into a sanatorium and so with many others.

Many "Break Up" Auctions Held And Gems of Houses Disappear

A few mansions, especially those which are remote from centres of population, have been pulled down, and their internal enrichments and not a little of the structural brick, stone and timber, exhibiting the patient skill of past generations of craftsmen, will go to make modern houses elegant. Some of the latter, composed of material bought at "break up" auctions, are so cunningly compounded that they require a critical examination to prove that they are not in fact mellowed and hallowed by the passage of time, as and where they now stand.

Great names are associated with some of the London houses, such as Devonshire House and Lord Salisbury's, that have been sold of late. The former, sold to a firm of builders, may perhaps eventually be incorporated in a great hotel. Its two acres of grounds front on Piccadilly and overlook Buckingham Palace, and they adjoin those of another noble old London mansion, Lord Lansdowne's, which has lately been taken by Mr. Gordon Selfridge.

Let none infer, however, from the recital of the extent to which England is changing hands that everything is in the melting pot socially. It is not, and despite the vast number of famous and ancient estates in the market there remain yet more that are still owned and occupied by the bearers of names that have been associated with them for generations. So long as they can continue their connection with the properties so long will the ownership of the great English domains have amenities such as money alone is powerless to provide.



Taymouth Castle, in Perthshire, immortalized by Robert Burns, another famous place to go under the hammer. It will become a rest cure hotel.